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LIFE AND WORKS OF SAADIA.¹

גלגל חוזר בעולם. "There is a constantly revolving wheel in the Universe." The heavenly luminaries which now ascend and approach the zenith, are soon forced by the ever-running *galgel* to a downward course, till they hide below the horizon. But they do not all disappear in the same manner, some vanish without leaving any trace, whilst others continue, at least for some time, to send forth unto us the rays of their light. Man, likewise, in his glory does not abide; but there are men who have made such an impression on the *galgel hachozer ba-olam*, that from time to time, on certain occasions they attract our attention; we then seem to hear their voice, to enjoy their company, and to witness their achievements.

Such is the case with the Gaon Saadia—or Saïd as he calls himself in *Sefer haggalui*—who celebrates his thousandth birthday this year. A thousand years ago Islamism was dominant in Western Asia and North Africa, whilst in the greater part of Europe, Christianity ruled supreme, and the Papal influence was continually gaining in strength. Mohammedan potentates, in periods of peace, favoured science, philosophy and literature. The Jews, dispersed among peoples of various tongues and creeds, in Asia Africa and Europe, retained their distinctiveness as a

¹ A paper read before the Jews' College, Literary Society, 1891.

religious community, and managed to keep united by the ideal bond of their faith and the holy Torah. The ancient centre, Jerusalem with the Temple, was to some extent replaced by the Babylonian seats of learning, the colleges of Sura and Pumbeditha, whose teaching staff formed for the Jews the highest Court of Appeal in all matters of dispute and doubt.

The questions addressed to the heads of the colleges and the answers given, both of which have been collected and are known as *Reponsa* of the Geonim, give us an insight into the private and communal life of our brethren a thousand years ago. Among the inquirers and litigants we notice traders, artisans, agriculturists and professional men. The Jews own land and cultivate it, but there is not sufficient security; some of the lawsuits result from acts of violence and injustice on the part of cruel rulers. Jews freely associate with non-Jews, they trade together, and form partnerships, and these give rise to questions about the observance of Sabbath, Holydays and the year of release. The communities are governed by *Zekenim*, "Wardens," *Shibhah tubhe ha-ir*, "Board of Management" and the *Gabbai tzedakah*, "The Guardians for the Poor." For the religious guidance of the congregations there are *Rabbis* and *Dayyanim*; in the synagogue "the Deputy of the Congregation" *Sheliach-tsibbur* is the chief reader; only the *Amidah* is read by him before the *tebhah* (Ark) whilst the rest of the service, especially the lessons from the Pentateuch and the Prophets are read from the *bimah*. There occurs also the term *chazan*, which sometimes designates the superintendent, sometimes the reader, and occasionally also the beadle. Shelters for the poor are connected with the synagogues. Divine service is in its main parts the same as at present. Some peculiar customs will be noticed later on. There is a general uniformity in all fundamental rites and forms, but there is also a great diversity of *minhagim*. Occasionally a *minhag* may have been criticised or suspected as illegal, but once established

in practice it resisted all adverse criticism. Even an appeal to the schools of Sura and Pumbeditha was of little avail. Of what kind the *minhagim* were which sometimes formed the subject of dispute between the different elements of a community, may be inferred from the following case. It was the custom of certain members of one of the communities to assemble on Sabbaths and Holydays early before daybreak in the Synagogue, for the purpose of reading Bible and Talmud, and frequently they were still reading when the rest of the congregation had already come for the regular service. The latter protested and appealed to the highest authority, but in vain. The remarkable thing in this case is the contention of those who assembled in the synagogue in the early morning, that, working hard for their living during the week, they could not afford to lose any part of the day appointed for their spiritual welfare. The zeal of the Jews of those days in seeking knowledge, and especially knowledge of the Torah, finds expression in the numerous questions of a purely literary character that were sent to the teachers of the colleges. Many questions concerned the religious controversy of the age. The heads of the schools were appealed to for instruction how to refute the sceptic or sectarian. The Karaites or the adherents of the *Kara*, the written text of the Pentateuch, were very active in propagating their doctrines and attacking traditional Judaism. Their opposition was similar to that which the Sadducees had made to the Pharisees about a thousand years before. Although the war was carried on with great bitterness on both sides, it was a bloodless literary warfare, and therefore much milder than that of the Sadducees and Pharisees. In accordance with this progress the religious controversy of the present age might be expected to be free from bitterness, hatred, and mutual recriminations, without any diminution of genuine enthusiasm for truth.—Such was the condition of the surroundings into which Saadia was born.

The date of his birth was established by S. Rappoport in his biography of Saadia (*Toledoth Rabbenu Saadia Gaon* in *Bikkure ha'ittim* 5589) to be 4652 (892 C.E.), in spite of the date 4632 (872 C.E.) given in Saadia's *Emunoth vedeoth* as the date of the composition of this book. Subsequent biographers of Saadia have confirmed it; the date is further attested by an official document signed by Saadia as the President of the College of Sura, which bears the date 240 S.E. (939 C.E.). Again, the reply of Ben-Meir to the Babylonian authorities (ed. Harkavy *Zichron Iarishonim*, V., p. 218) in which he abuses Saadia together with the *Resh-galutha*, David ben Saccai, and others for their opposition to his system of the Jewish Calendar, was written 922. These statements clearly prove the correctness of Rappoport's emendation of the date, 4632, of the *Emunoth vedeoth* into 4692.

The name of his father is Joseph—in Mohammedan sources it is Jacob. One of his Karaite opponents asserted that Saadia came from a family of Proselytes. Saadia protested against this assertion, and stated that he was a descendant of Shelah, son of Judah, and that Rabbi Chaninah b. Dosa was one of his ancestors. He would have lost nothing by his enemy's assertion, and in fact, he gained nothing by his own defence, but such controversy seems to have formed part of the tactics of the literary warfare of the times.

Saadia lived at first at Fayyum, the Pithom of the Bible, where he was probably born, since he is called al-Fayyumi, in Hebrew ha-Pithomi. Instead of al-Fayyumi, his opponent calls him al-Dilassi, Dilass being probably a small place near Fayyum, thus implying that came Saadia from an unimportant community, and not from Fayyum, as was generally believed. The treasures of knowledge which he had collected in his younger days were manifold, embracing Bible, Talmud, Philosophy and Science. More, however, than all this knowledge, did his intense love and enthusiasm for the Torah, both for its study and

its practice, qualify him for the duties of an *omed bap-perets*, of one who was destined to stand in the breach and protect from threatening dangers the inherited and sacred treasure of his religion. Although the Karaites had for a long time been preaching and teaching their theory, Saadia seems to have been the first that ventured to take up arms for the defence of traditional Judaism. When twenty-three years old, he proved already a trained soldier in the battlefield of religious controversy. The treatise, which he then wrote, has not yet been discovered; it was, according to Ibn Ezra, directed against Anan, the supposed founder of the sect of the Karaites. It was by no means the first product of his pen; his literary career had commenced long before, as will be shown later on. His fame and name soon spread, and in the year 928, while still comparatively young, he was called to fill the vacant Gaonship of the College of Sura. The sun of that college had already passed the zenith, and had in its downward course come so near the horizon, that it was even proposed to close the college altogether, and to transfer its staff and authority to Pumbeditha. But the Resh-galutha, David b. Saccai, devised a fresh plan and thus renewed the vital powers of the institution. Hitherto it had been the practice to elect to that Gaonship only men of the Sura College; the Resh-galutha now proposed to offer the chair to Saadia of Fayyum. Under the leadership of Saadia the College again flourished as the centre of Jewish learning, and the Gaon was generally respected as the *rosh hammedabberim bechol makom*, as the highest authority in all matters of religious knowledge and practice. But for only a short time—the space of two years—was he allowed to continue his work in peace. He was once asked to confirm a decision made by the *Resh-galutha*, who was politically his superior. Saadia thought the decision wrong, and refused to sign the document submitted to him. As a punishment for this disobedience Saadia was deposed. Saadia resisted, declared

the *Resh-galutha* as deposed and excommunicated, and proclaimed a brother of David b. Saccai as the *Resh-galutha*. Both parties appealed to the Chalif Almuktadir. The *status quo*, however, remained for two years, till the death of the Chalif. The new Chalif gave his verdict against Saadia; the latter fled, and kept at a distance from Sura for four years. During this enforced leisure he wrote several of his philosophical and polemical treatises. He was, however, not forgotten at Sura, and was even chosen by one of the parties in a lawsuit to act as judge, together with the *Resh-galutha*, chosen by the other party. This incident led to the reconciliation between the *Resh-galutha* and the Gaon of Sura, which took place on the fast of Esther, 4697 (937 C.E.) The reconciliation was a genuine one, and Saadia continued his friendship to the family of David b. Saccai, after the death of the latter. Saadia remained in office five years, and died 4702 (942 C.E.) In spite of his short and troubled life, his literary productions were numerous, and include 1, Philosophy; 2, Liturgy; 3, Translations and Commentaries on the Bible; 4, Talmudica; 5, Hebrew Language; 6, Polemics.

1. PHILOSOPHY.

Saadia's philosophy is contained in his *Kitab al-amānōt val-itikadōt* ("Beliefs and Opinions"), better known by the title of the Hebrew version, *Emunoth ve-deoth*. The book is written in an easy and simple style; definitions, propositions and proofs are given in intelligible language; the arguments are all brought forth by number, each one having its place in the plan of the whole work. The object of the book is to prove the principles of Judaism, and to defend them from their opponents—unbelievers, Christians and Mohammedans. There are some who maintain that Saadia does not refute Mohammedanism, as he did not like to offend the Mohammedans, in whose midst he lived. The fact is that he had less cause for attacking

Islamism; it teaches, like the Jews, the Incorporeality and the Unity of God. When he treats of the Immutability of the Torah he is as frankly outspoken against the Islam as he is against Christianity. It may, however, seem strange that Saadia, the most energetic opponent of the Karaites, passes them over in silence in this work. But the author declares at the outset that he only intends to discuss the principles of the Jewish religion, and not all its details. The disputes with the Karaites concerned only certain details; the Karaites did not reject tradition as such, but only certain traditional explanations and certain Rabbinical precepts.

The estimation in which the book was held by succeeding teachers in Israel may be inferred from the following passage from Bachya's *Chobhoth hallebhubhoth*: "The reading of Saadia's works will help you toward obtaining a knowledge of God; they enlighten the intellect, sharpen the reason, instruct the ignorant and impel the lazy to activity." The seventh and eighth chapters, on Resurrection and on Messiah, were the most popular section of the book, and were frequently edited separately, under the title: *Hattechiya ve-happeduth*, and the latter alone: *Happeduth ve-happurkan* or *Haggaluth ve-happurkan*.

The book begins with praises of God, the source of all the true knowledge that man is able to acquire. Doubts and errors with regard to such truths as have been firmly established, are traced to man's want of knowledge, lack of perseverance, folly, worldliness, conceit and partiality for his own cherished views. Man's opinions whether correct or not, when received and confirmed by his intellect as the result of reasoning, and made part of his inner life, form his *emunah* "faith" or "conviction." There are, however, tests by means of which we are enabled to eliminate false opinions from our mind. For we must reject whatever can be proved to be contrary either to that which our senses perceive, or to any of those axioms which are like innate ideas, and are generally

admitted as true, or to any logical conclusion. To these general tests: sensation, axioms, and logic, Saadia adds a fourth for those who believe in the truth of the Bible, the *haggadah neëmeneth*, "trustworthy communication." That the words of the Bible are trustworthy has been proved by the application of the three general tests.

Revelation was necessary, though men might have arrived at the truth by means of the three general tests; but the process would have been slow, and many would not complete it in their lifetime. The belief in the existence of *haggadah neëmeneth*, which we find indispensable in our social intercourse, is shown by our author (ch. iii.) to have been a necessary and important agent in the transmission of the revealed truths and precepts to all generations. For this purpose the Almighty has endowed us with the faculty of receiving truthful communications and making them our own. Thus the Israelites who stood round Mount Sinai, and all the prophets, were convinced, through the signs and wonders which they perceived, that it was God who addressed them. The prophets again, when speaking to the people in the name of God, proved their mission by sure signs. That which the whole nation received as true was by *haggadah neëmeneth* transmitted to succeeding generations.

By the application of these four tests, viz., sensation, axioms, logic and trustworthy communication, Saadia argues the correctness of the principles of Judaism. The Existence and the Unity of God are discussed in the first two chapters; in the third chapter the object, the necessity and the permanent character of the Divine precepts are shown, and the arguments of those who believe in the temporary character of the law (*bittul torah*) are refuted.

In the third and the fourth chapters Saadia expounds the doctrine of man's responsibility and freewill, and refutes the theory of necessity. Man has the faculty of choosing between obedience and disobedience to the Divine precepts, and on his choice depends his well-being, and if

he finds that his condition is not in accordance with his conduct, he must bear in mind that there is a hereafter, to which this principle applies, and that even his very troubles and pains will prove a benefit to him, for they are intended to lead him to prayers and repentance, and thereby to true well-being.

Our soul, though distinct from the body, is described by Saadia as consisting of some superior kind of substance, something like the quintessence of the heavenly spheres. It animates the body, and continues to exist when separated from it. It is not clear whether, according to Saadia, the soul has an existence before it joins the body; he denies its pre-existence from eternity, and also its migration from one body to another. The soul remains after man's death in a separate state till the Almighty shall determine its reunion with the body. However strange such reunion of the soul with the body—man's resurrection—may seem, it does not appear impossible to the mind of those who believe in the Omnipotent, the Creator of Nature and its laws. Saadia limits the resurrection to the good and righteous; and, according to his view, it will serve, like all other miracles and signs of the Bible, as an illustration of God's omnipotence. When the hoped-for extraordinary event takes place, the pious will be confirmed in their faith in the teaching of the prophets concerning the future life. The resurrection will, according to our author, take place in the days of the final redemption of Israel. The two principles, Israel's final redemption and the future life, are fully discussed in the eighth and the ninth chapters; the latter one, which treats of the future life, is headed, "Reward and Punishment," because it is in the *Olam habba* that the full measure of what man deserves for his conduct in life is promised to him. What this conduct is expected to be is taught in the concluding chapter of the book. Of the three elements contained in our soul, viz., appetites, passions and reason, the last one must have full control over the first two; and, so long as this is the case, every

one of the manifold appetites and passions contributes its share to our well-being, but none of them alone can make us happy, if the rest be suppressed or unduly neglected. A reasonable combination of all of them is the best means for securing the summum bonum.

2.—LITURGY.

Abraham ibn Ezra, in his Commentary on Ecclesiastes v. 1, strongly objects to Kalir's style of piyyut, and praises Saadia's liturgical compositions as excellent in correctness and simplicity. Ibn Ezra mentions two *bakkashoth* of Saadia, and these, beginning אלהי הוא ה' לבדך and ה' שפתי הפרה certainly deserve all this praise. Equally simple in style is the *viduj utheshinnah* ("confession" and "prayer") in the *Selichoth* for *Erebh Rosh-hashshannah*; it is ascribed to Saadia, but in its present form it contains many additions by later authors. (See Rappoport, *Bikkure haïttim*, 5589; Landshuth, *Amude haabodah*). There is another *viduj* that bears the name of Saadia (Dukes, *Relig. Poesie*, page 152). It begins with part of the prayer אלהי נשמה (Daily Prayers, Morning Service), which, on account of the phrase מודה אני לפניך ("I acknowledge before thee") was considered a suitable introduction to a confession. If this *viduj* was written by a Saadia, it is most probably not the Gaon Saadia. Less simple is his *Abhodah* for the Musaph of the Day of Atonement. It consists of two parts: The first contains the narrative of the Bible from the beginning to the appointment of the family of Aaron for the priesthood; the second describes the Temple Service for the Day of Atonement, according to Mishnah Yoma. The *abhodah* is rhymed and alphabetical. Besides these compositions Saadia wrote also piyyutim in the style of Kalir, with all the features characterised by Ibn Ezra as unsuitable. Ibn Ezra does not seem to have known them, or they are wrongly ascribed to the Gaon. Such is the composition called *Azharoth* for the Musaph of

Shabhuoth. It contains the enumeration of the six hundred and thirteen precepts in ten groups, according to the Ten Commandments. As regards other Selichoth and Piyyutim attributed to Saadia, see Landshuth (*l.c.*).

The most important liturgical work of Saadia is his *Siddur*, of which a MS. copy is found in the Bodleian Library. Steinschneider has the merit of having first noticed it. He describes it in the Catalogue of the Hebrew books in the Bodleian Library. The *Siddur* contains the Daily Prayers, and the Service for Sabbath, Festivals, and Fasts, with additional supplications and hymns; the directions and the *dinim* regulating Jewish life are given in Arabic: also one of the *bakkashoth* is translated into this language. It is remarkable that the ten reasons for the precept of blowing the *shofar* on New Year, given in the ordinary *machzorim* in the name of Saadia, are not found in this *Siddur*.

3.—COMMENTARIES AND TRANSLATIONS OF THE BIBLE.

Saadia translated the Pentateuch, Isaiah, the Psalms, the Song of Solomon, Job, and Daniel, and wrote commentaries on almost all the books of the Bible.¹ The Commentary on the Pentateuch is several times referred to in his *Emunoth vedeoth*. Ibn Ezra, in the introduction to his Commentary on the Pentateuch, speaks of five kinds of commentators, one of which he describes as follows:—"Their way is long and wide; if the true sense of the text

¹ The first edition of Saadia's *Arabic Version of the Pent.* seems to be the Constant. edition of 1546; the version contained in *Bibl. Polygl.* (Paris, 1628) differs much from the first, but is no doubt based on it, as the same characteristic deviations from the literal rendering are met with in both. The *Arabic Version of Isaiah* has been edited by H. E. G. Paulus (Jena, 1790). Excerpts from Saadia's Version of Psalms and Job have been given by Ewald and Dukes in *Beitr. zur Gesch. der ältesten Auslegung des A.T.* J. Schwarzstein translated Saadia's *Arabic Version of Genesis* into German (Ff. o/M., 1886). Saadia's version of other books and his commentaries are extant in MSS. contained in the libraries of the British Museum, the Bodleian, and others.

is like the centre of a circle, their explanations must be compared to its circumference. This is Saadia's method: in commenting on the words, 'Let there be luminaries,' he discusses all that astronomers have to say on the nature of the heavenly bodies." Saadia, however, must have thought differently; for he declares brevity a necessity, and claims it as part of his own method. In spite of his severe criticism, Ibn Ezra wrote a treatise—called *Sefath Yether*—in defence of Saadia, who was attacked by Adonim or Dunash ben Labrat. But Ibn Ezra is again severe upon Saadia, when the latter connects in ten cases two sentences separated by the accent (*sof-pasuk*), Ibn Ezra frequently protests against those who disregard the accents. Thus in *Tsachoth* he says:—"I am at a loss to see how any one can imagine that Ezra, the Levite, who added the accents to the text, could have made such mistakes as to put a *sof-pasuk* in the wrong place, as has been assumed by Saadia." The accents, however, were not entirely ignored by Saadia; the ten instances referred to are exceptions. He even wrote treatises in the style of the Bible, divided into verses, and fully provided with vowel-points and accents. As regards figurative language in the Bible, he would admit its presence only when forced by the nature of the phrase, *i.e.*, when the literal rendering would include an impossibility, or an absurdity, or a contradiction to what is known from other statements in the Bible and the Tradition. When a literal rendering would not be sufficiently clear, Saadia gives a paraphrase instead of a translation.

A few instances of deviation from the literal sense of the text may serve as an illustration of the method which he followed in the translation and composition of the Bible.

In order to soften anthropomorphic expressions, he renders וַיֹּאמֶר, "and he willed" (Gen. i. 3); וַיֵּדָע, "and he knew" (ib. 4); בְּנִי אֲהַבָהּ, "thou art my beloved" (Ps. ii. 6). To prevent misunderstanding with regard to the unity of God, "he renders, ה' שְׁלַחֲנִי וּרְחוּם, "the Lord hath sent

me by his spirit" (Is. xlviii. 16). "Evil cannot proceed from the Lord;" and when the prophet says, "I (God) make peace and create evil" (Ibid. xlv. 7), these words are interpreted: God gave man free-will, by means of which man can derive peace or evil from that which God created—God does not force man to do good or to keep away from evil, but exhorts and warns him; this is the meaning of, "I withheld thee from sinning" (Gen. xx. 6). Much less does He mislead man; פתיתי (Ez. xiv. 9) means, "I declared that he was misled;" אל הרהענו (Is. xiii. 17), "Do not condemn us as misled." In another case he makes use of the literal meaning of a word, in order to prove the immutability of God's command: וזעלחו (Gen. xxii. 2), "bring him up;" and not "sacrifice him." The verse, "He shall call to the heavens from above and to the earth that He may judge the people" (Ps. l. 4) is interpreted to refer to the Resurrection, the reunion of the heavenly element in man, the soul, and the earthly element, the body, for the purpose of their judgment. Sometimes he adds a word in order to make the sense clear, *e.g.*, Gen. iv. 7, "And thou shalt rule over it," *according to thy will*. In other cases he omits the repetition of a noun, replacing it by a pronoun; sometimes he adds conjunctions for the connection of two consecutive sentences, thus, *e.g.*, in Gen. i. 12, 13, "when God knew that it was good, and when a second day of evening and morning had passed, God willed," etc. Now and then, he has to refute in his commentary arguments of Karaites, Christians and Mohammedans, as, *e.g.*, in the exposition of passages like the following, "Ye shall not kindle fire" (Ex. xxxv. 3); "on the morrow of the Sabbath" (Lev. xxiii. 11); "he came from Sinai and rose up from Seir unto them, shined forth from the mount Paran" (Deut. xxxiii. 2); "See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no God with me; I kill and I make alive" (Ibid. xxxii. 39). In expounding the Book of Daniel, he yields to the temptation to calculate the exact time of Messiah from "a season, seasons and a half" (Dan. x. 7), and brings upon

himself the rebuke of Maimonides, in his *Iggereth teman*, such calculations being disapproved of by our Sages.

Saadia's version of the Pentateuch was, according to Ibn Ezra, originally written in Arabic letters, for he says (on Gen. ii. 11), "Saadia arbitrarily translates חוּיִלָּה by 'Nile,' there being no exact tradition about the Biblical names, etc. It may be that the fact of translating the Torah into Arabic, and writing the translation in Arabic letters, compelled him to give a definite rendering of everything, as otherwise Mohammedans might consider us ignorant of the teachings of the Holy Law." Saadia's translation of the Torah is highly esteemed by the Jews in the East, and treated as an authorised version. In the introduction to the *Commentary on the Pentateuch*, Saadia describes the figurative language employed in the Bible, and shows how to interpret the Scriptures. Short essays precede several sections; *e.g.*, an exposition of the Jewish Calendar precedes Ex. xii.; ch. xx. is preceded by an essay on the manner of arranging the 613 precepts in ten groups, on the basis of the Decalogue.

The Song of Solomon is interpreted as an allegorical history of Israel. There is also a *Commentary on Daniel* extant, in MS., but the commentary attributed to him in the *Mikraoth Gedoloth* is not his work, since it differs from the view of Saadia, expressed in his *Emunoth vedeoth* on important passages of the book. It contains, however, the quotations from Saadia in Ibn Ezra's *Commentary on Daniel*, and it is possible that Ibn Ezra considered it as the work of Saadia.

4.—TALMUDICA.

Saadia translated the Mishnah into Arabic, according to the statement of R. Pethachia, who found in the land of Babel the Commentaries of Saadia on the Bible and the Mishnah being eagerly read and studied. He wrote several treatises on Talmudical themes. On *Sh'taroth* (documents); *Pikdonoth* (trusts); on Marriages; on the

Calendar; and on Cleanness and Uncleanness. All these are only known from quotations.

In his position as Gaon of the College of Sura, he had to settle legal questions and to answer all sorts of queries. Comparatively few of such *teshubhoth* ("replies") are extant. Some are included in the *Teshubhoth haggeonim*, edited by A. Harkavy (Berlin, 1887). Seventeen numbers of this collection contain decisions or explanations of Saadia. A few instances will show the nature of these *teshubhoth*. No. 534: There is a dispute between two neighbours about the position of the gutter. Saadia decides that the one can force the other to alter its position from one place to another on the same side of the house, but not from one side of the house to another. No. 540: The mother and the brother of a deceased person claim the property left. Saadia decides in favour of the brother. No. 558: Man and wife were killed by the fall of a house. Who is heir to the property of the wife? If the wife died first, the husband inherited her property, and his relations had a claim to the property; if not, her relations were entitled to its possession. Saadia decided in favour of the latter, on account of the doubt; because they were the natural owners, and the right of dispossessing them must be clearly proved. No. 551: Saadia declares the legality of a document written in Arabic. No. 555: Saadia examines the decision of the Resh-galutha, and confirms it. This document is the only one in the collection that has a date, viz., Monday, 21st of Sivan, 1270, Sel. era (929 C.E.), and belongs, therefore, to the earliest period of his Gaonship. There are twenty-one verses in the Lessons from the Bible, which, according to the regulations in Saadia's *Siddur*, have to be read without the Targum; and ten others, which have to be repeated with the Targum by the whole congregation. What shall congregations do, which, though having adopted the *Siddur* of Saadia as their guide, differ in their minhag with regard to this particular regulation? "Do not alter your minhag," was the reply, "if

the alteration is likely to cause disunion in the community."

In the first chapter of *Emunoth vedeoth*, our author mentions his Commentary on the book *Yetsirah*, with regard to proofs for the creation of time. The Commentary is written in Arabic, and is contained in Codex 1533 (Cat. Neubauer) of the Bodleian Library. Joseph b. Moses translated it into Hebrew. This translation is extant in MS., and is different from the printed Hebrew Commentary on *Sefer Yetsirah*, which has been attributed to Saadia, but wrongly, as has been proved by Rappoport (*Bikkure haïttim*, 5589, note 32.)

5.—HEBREW LANGUAGE.

Ibn Ezra, in *Sefer Moz'nayim*, gives a list of those who wrote Hebrew grammars or dictionaries. The first place in this list is occupied by Saadia, and three of his works are named, *Lashon Ibrith*, *Lashon Tsachuth*, and *Sefer Haïgron*. To these must be added *Sefer Haggalui* and *Pithron Tishim Milloth* (explanation of ninety words). The first two are not known; they may be parts of the third, which treats of the merits of the Hebrew language, and teaches good style (*Tsachuth*). Only fragments of the *Sefer Haïgron* are extant, and have been edited, with a full account of the literature connected therewith, by A. Harkavy in the fifth volume of *Zichron Larishonim*. The book has passed through several successive stages, and seems to have occupied the mind of the author for many years. The original plan of the book was very modest; it was intended to supply two lists of words for those who desired to write poems; the one arranged alphabetically according to the initial letter, and the other according to the closing syllable. The idea was suggested to Saadia by a similar book in Arabic. Such a collection of words does not require advanced learning or great knowledge; it is suitable work for a youthful aspirant for

authorship. According to the author's statement in the Hebrew introduction, he wrote, that is to say, he *commenced* to write this book in the year 1214 S.E.(=903 C.E.), at the age of eleven years; twenty years later he wrote an introduction in Arabic; in the interval he reproduced the work, enlarged its scope and added a Hebrew introduction. A boy of eleven years is certainly young, but not too young for conceiving the idea of compiling words, and arranging them according to a certain method, considering that the idea was not original, and that a long time may have passed before the collection was finished. It seems that Saadia purposely points out the date in order to show how early he commenced to work for the benefit of his brethren. Harkavy suspects in the date a mistake of the copyist, who changed the original, *arba esrim* (24), into *arba-esre* (14). But if the copyist, as Harkavy believes, thought *arba-esrim* grammatically wrong on account of the missing *vav*, he would rather have added the *vav* instead of altering the date. Again, according to Harkavy, Saadia does not say that he wrote the introduction twenty years later, but that he was twenty years old when he wrote the book. The words of Saadia, וְיָקַד מִצֵּא אֵלַי כִּי סִנֵּיָהּ, no doubt admit of this rendering, but are in this sense out of place. There is no occasion whatever to mention here his age, it would make no difference in the value of the book whether the author was twenty, or older, or younger, at the time of its composition. But the statement that twenty years had since elapsed, would convey the idea that the author had sufficient time for producing an enlarged and improved edition. And, in fact, Saadia proceeds immediately to enumerate the additions which he has made to the original book.

In the enlarged work, Saadia added to the above mentioned two lists of words, for the beginning and the end of the lines of poems, lessons on that which is between the two extremities of the lines, on "the soul of the poem," on the nature of the words, sentences, ideas and figures. His

views are illustrated by quotations from the compositions of José b. José, Jannai, Elazar (Kalir), Joshua, and Pinchas ; the writings of the two last named are not known. He intended to quote later writers, but only when they were correct, and not when he would have to expose their shortcomings. All this is only known from Saadia's statement in the Introduction, the book itself not being extant. The fragment ends in the middle of a rule about the servile letters. As this passage appears to have been misunderstood by its commentator, I add here its translation: "I found every word of a person to be one of two things; you will find it to be either 'foundation' (noun, signifying the substance of a thing), or 'addition' (verb, signifying something predicated of the former); and in the word added there is likewise a 'foundation' (a radical element to be distinguished from the formative additions). The additions indicate one of the following three things: quantity, relation, or time (past, future, and present). The foundations are those which remain firmly in their place; the additions are subject to change. The letters which may be added in front of a word are the following:—**האובים כשתלן** ('the young branches are like the stem'); seven of these are found with the foundation (noun), as well as with the addition (verb), viz., **בשלום כה** ('in peace here'), and four only with the changeable (verb), viz., **איתן** ('strong')."

A fragment of another work of Saadia, the *Sefer Haggalui*, has likewise been edited by A. Harkavy, and published by the *Mekitse nirdamim* in *Zichron Iarishonim*. The meaning of the title has been explained by the author himself to signify "the exiled." He wrote the book during his exile from Sura, when deposed by the Resh-galutha David ben Saccai. The book is divided into ten chapters, the first seven of which were intended as replies to personal attacks made on him by his opponents. Ch. 1. On the nature and the merits of wisdom, in reply to those who found fault with his love for general knowledge. Ch. 2. On the chronology and history of tradition, probably against those

who criticised his view on the origin of the Jewish Calendar. Ch. 3. On his dispute with David ben Saccai. Ch. 4. On the fact that Israel is never entirely bereaved of spiritual guidance. Ch. 5. On the principles of the precepts and the prophecies, in defence of his view on the time of Messiah. Ch. 6. On his troubles caused by his enemies, and the protection granted to him by Providence. Ch. 7. Description of his persecutors. Ch. 8. On the Hebrew language. Ch. 9. On Hebrew prosody. Ch. 10. On style.

The work was originally written in Hebrew, in the style of the Bible, divided into verses, and provided with accents. His opponents charged him with arrogance for imitating the style of the prophets, and speaking of himself in the same phrases in which the prophets spoke of themselves. He translated the book into Arabic, and added in the same language a commentary and a preface. In the preface he refuted the charges made against him, and showed that in writing his books in the way he did for the benefit of his brethren, he followed the example set by Sirach, Elazar ben Irai, and the Hasmoneans.

Of his other works on the Hebrew language only the *Explanation of Ninety Difficult Words* is known, it having been edited several times. The Arabic heading speaks of seventy words, which occur only once in the Bible; and yet ninety are enumerated, either the title is wrong, or twenty words have been added later on by a learned copyist without altering the title.

6.—POLEMICS.

From the *Sefer haggalui* we learn that Saadia had to defend himself from the attacks of opponents right and left. His principal adversaries were the Karaites. He wrote against Anan, Solomon ben Yerocham, Sakwiya, and Ben-Suta. He further wrote *Teshubhoth al Chiri habbalehi*, who was neither a Karaite nor a Rabbanite, but a sceptic, and gave expression to his scepticism in two hundred questions

in reference to the Bible. Both the questions of Chivi and the replies of Saadia are only known from quotations. (On the sources of Chivi's scepticism see *Etudes Juives*, XXII., p. 287.)

An important and interesting dispute arose between Saadia and a certain Ben-Meir, concerning the traditional calculation of the Calendar. The Jewish Calendar is based on the following principles:—

1. The time between two consecutive conjunctions of sun and moon is 29 days $12\frac{7.9.3}{10.8.6}$ hours. 2. If the conjunction (*molad*) of Tishri happens to take place before noon that day is counted the 1st of Tishri; if later, the next day, or the day after that, is declared to be the 1st of Tishri. 3. Sunday, Wednesday and Friday are disqualified for the 1st of Tishri. 4. The duration of an ordinary year cannot be less than 353 days, or more than 355 days; of a leap-year not less than 383, nor more than 385. 5. If the conjunction takes place on Monday at $9\frac{5.8.9}{10.8.0}$ a.m., or later, the preceding year having been a leap-year, the 1st of Tishri is to be on Tuesday. 6. If, in an ordinary year, the conjunction of Tishri takes place on Tuesday at $3\frac{2.0.4}{10.8.0}$ a.m., Thursday is the 1st of Tishri. In the years 4682, '83 and '84, the conjunction of Tishri took place on Wednesday, $5\frac{9.3.2}{10.8.0}$ a.m.; Tuesday, $3\frac{4.4.1}{10.8.0}$ a.m.; Saturday, $12\frac{2.3.7}{10.8.0}$ p.m. The first being a leap-year, the 1st of Tishri in the next year, according to Rule 5, must not be on Tuesday but on Thursday, and in the third year the 1st of Tishri cannot be on Saturday on account of Rule 2, but on Monday. Ben-Meir objected to this arrangement, assuming that Rule 2 was incorrect, that instead of noon the limit should be $12\frac{6.4.2}{10.8.0}$ p.m., and that Rules 5 and 6 must be modified accordingly. He would, therefore, fix the 1st of Tishri, 4684, on Saturday, and 4683 on Tuesday. Ben-Meir asserted that he based his theory on tradition, and he may have derived some support for it from the opinion of Rabban Gamliel, who held that the interval between the conjunction and the visibility of the moon was variable,

and was sometimes less than half the day. He insisted that his theory should have the preference to that of the Babylonian schools, as he was in Palestine, whence the Babylonians had always had to seek information and authority.—Part of this fragment is here subjoined in a revised form.

If there are some who would exclaim **חבל על דאבדין** in reference to the lost polemical writings of Saadia and his opponents, we do not join in this lamentation. The few fragments of this class of literature that have been unearthed are not such as to create an appetite for more of them, and we should rather be inclined to exclaim **עליהם השלום**: “May they rest, where they are, in peace!”

[י] **שובור מוטות עול הגלות מעל צואריכם ויניח לכם מכל איביכם מסביב ונוכח ותזכו לראות בנחמה ולהתבשר ברגלי המבשר משמ' שלום ותשקטו בשלוה [וינוכו] מכם יגנות ולא תהיה משכלה ועק' בארצכם וחזקו בהוכח ולכל אשר תפנו ותשכילו ותצליחו בכל מעשה ידכם ותשרשו ותעניפו ותעשו שרשים למטה וענפים למעלה ותהי מקורכם ברוך ומעינכם מתגבר ושלום רב מן השמים יהי עליכם תמיד : וכתב זה וחקק¹ אתו בחדש טבת שנת א'רל"ג ע"ש**

פאנבה בן מאיר

**שלום מעניף עד שמי מרומים • ומצליל עד יצוק הדומים •
סובב ומקיף כולל כל עולמים • אפוד חן עמוף רחמים • ממתיק
טעם כמו לרקחי סמים • כאיתן בא בימים • כאחוב הנעקד
לרצון תמים וכחקוק בכסא מרומים • וככבול הפותר היוזנות
וחלומים • וכטוב שניתן בשיע אנמים • וכמלאך משרת לפני
אדון עולמים • וכגער לחרס וסחר מרומים • וכירובעל שניסה
בגזה שתי פעמים • וכצמא² ושתה מימי לחי בסימים • וכגלעדי
ששפט עם וביתו התמימים • וכחקריב מלה חלב לפצות על
רחומים • וכתושב שנם ענני שני פעמים • וכמאבל שהפליא
פלאים עצומים • וכמגת ששט בעמקי תהומים • ושמע טוב
בשנים עשר החתומים • ושם טוב חמגן בניצוח טעמים וגו'
גם להודיעכם ביאור כל שער ושער אשר למדנו מן החכמים
הראשונים ז"ל וכן הוא מפורש שאין ראש השנה נהכון לא.**

בא' בשבת ולא בד' ולא בו' כענין שלמדנו וירשנו מאבותינו רבן גמלי' הנשיא ורבנו יהודה הנשיא לא אד"ו ראש הש' אלא בשני וג' וה' וביום השבת • לא נחלקו חכמ' שיום קודש ראש השנה נקרא באחד מאלו ארבעה ימים וכך העמידה סנהדרין גדול את גבולן רק לארבעת ימים האלה וזה פירושן נולד תשרי בנ"ה רואים אם נשתייר רביע יום חסר אמר"ת חלק' עושין אורו ראש ואם חסר במר"ת דוחין אותו • ואנו מבארין לכם מילת ד' הימים בד' שער' וכך מפורש בשער ראשון • [כל תשרי] שיש בו עיבור ונולד [רנ"ו] חלק משעה ז' מיום ד' אחוז [יום ה' וחסיר] מגיע סוף החשבון לילי ג' תרמ"ה חלק משעה ג' ³ ועוד לשנה האחרת כך ומגיע סוף החשבון ליום השבת לשש ⁴ [שעות תר"מא] חלק וכשאתה מונה כך יקרא ראש השנה הראשונה ביום [ה' ושניה ביום] ג' ושלישית ביום שבת נמצא ימים שביניהם ששה ⁵ [ו' במעוברת] וארבעה בפשוטה חסירה וזה עיקר חו"ג • ובין שנים ה' י[מים] וה' ימים בפשוטה כסדרן והעיקר כה"ז • ואם יעבור ח[לק] אחד מיכן יעבור שנה ג' משש שעות ² ואמר"ת ביום שבת בחלק במ"רת וצריך הדבר לדחותו עד יום שני נמצאת ראשונה ביום שבת ושנייה ביום ה' וביניהם ו' ימים וששה ימים בפשוטה שלמים והמסורת שו"ה והשלישית יום שני וביניהם ה' ימים וה' ימים בפשוטה כסדרן וחסימן כה"ב וכך אתם מוציאים בירור כלי..... וגם אמרו אם היה בשנה הבאה עיבור ונולד קודם [תתמ"ו ח]ל' משעה [מ'] בלילי ו' אחוז יום שבת וחסיר וביאור הדבר [הוא] שלא לדחות מעוברת משש שעות ואמר"ת ביום ג' ואם [יותר] חמנין אחוז יום שבת ושלי' וחמטעם שכיון שיעבור [חלק] על אמר"ת משעה ו' ביום ג' ידחה ליום ה' זה הוא כלל שער הראשון • שער שני • כל תשרי שיש בו עיבור ונולד (קודם) רנ"ו חלק' משעה ראשונה מיום ד' אחוז יום ה' וחסיר ועילת הדבר בזמן שמוולד של שנה מעוברת בר"נו חלק' משעה ראשונה מיום ד' • נולד של אחריה לשנה הבאה לילי שבת בתת"מה חלק' משעה ג' ¹ ושל אחריה ביום שבת בו' שעות ואמר"ת חל' משעה ז' ונמצא ראש השנה הראשונה חמישי והיא מעוברת שנייה בשלישי פשוטה ובין זו לזו ו' ימים וששה במעוברת חסירה וחסימן חו"ג והשלישית יום שבת ובין שניה לג' ה' ימים וה' ימים בפשוטה כסדרן • וטעמו שלסוד שאם יעבור המולד

³ אחר חצות לילה ⁴ מתחלת היום בבוקר ⁵ עד ועד בכלל

ממאתים נ"ו חלק' משעה ראשונה מיום ד' בחלק אחד ימצא מולד שנייה לח[יות] בתת'מו חלק' משעה י' ⁶ בלילי ג' ימצא מולד שלישית בו' שעות במר'ת ביום שבת ובזמן שהיה כן אנו צריכין לדחות ג' ליום החמישי ועדאין לא הגענו לגבול בזו השנה שכבר נשאר לנו ת'ד חלק' מפני שנולד תשרי בשנת התע"ו לחשבון הבית לילי ד' י"א שעות ⁶ תתק'לב חלק' וראש השנה ביום ה' והחדשים חסיר' ולא נוכל לדחותו שכבר נשאר ת'ד עד זמן שיגיע לגבול ר"נו משעה ראשונה ביום ד' ומחלק אחד לפני רנ"ו לא ידחהו ונדחהו מד' מאות וד' עד שלא יגיע לגבול שלימין ⁷ ובשנה הבאה אתם מוסיפין ד' ח' תת"עו יגיע המולד לילי ג' ט' שעות תמ"א חלק' ובשער ג' נאמר אם לא יהיה באותו תשרי עיבור ונולד קודם תתמ"ה חלק' משעה י' ⁶ מלילי ג' אחוז יום ג' וכסדרן • והשנה הבאה שהיא שנת תת"נד לחשבון הבית פשוטה היא נולד בלילי ג' בט' שעות תמ"א חלק' והיא בגבול ג' והחד' כסדרן ונשאר מן חשבון תת"מה חל' ת'ד עד שיגיע לגבול ולא נוכל לדחותו מפני המולד והשנה הג' שהיא שנת תת"נה לחשבון הבית נולד תשרי ביום חשבת בשש שעות רל"ז חל' ועדאין לא הגיע לגבול נשאר מן החשבון ת'ד חלק' ואנחנו לא נדחהו הר"מא והי' אמ"רת וכבר ⁸ שפרשנוהו בארבעה חודשים ⁹ • נדחהו רל"ז חלק' אין זה ראוי למבינים וגו'

M. FRIEDLÄNDER.

⁷ צ"ל של רנ"ו

⁶ אחר תחלת הלילה

⁹ אולי צ"ק שערים

⁸ צ"ל וכמו